

FORWARD

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INTERVIEW WITH MR. ROGER HILSMAN ON MONDAY JANUARY 26TH 1970

(Director, Bureau Intelligence & Research, State Department, 1961-1963)

D.H. One of the things that was particularly discussed in Britain in the 1960's was the so called anti-special relationship lobby within the Pentagon and State Department, how strong was this?

R.H. It depends upon which way which you cut this thing in terms of specific politics, that is, that there were people on the British side who were trying on specific policies trying to make something of it and, there were people on the American side on specific policies who were trying to resist because they felt the idea of a special relationship was being manipulated for policy reasons.

That was what George Ball was arguing about; Ball is deeply committed to one Europe; If Ball thought a special relationship would further those policies why he'd be all for a special relationship, but when it began to get cross-linked with them, then he was not for it.

D.H. Ball thought that this particular relationship between Britain and the United States was being exploited for short term gains at the expense of long term objectives. How much support was there for the type of view that Mr. Ball expressed specifically on the British deterrent?

R.H. I was not deeply involved in those issues, and really do not have a terribly informed opinion on it; the only time it really became an important issue was Skybolt, and the British just happened to get in the way of a McNamara fight with the American Airforce; it happened too that it was largely accidental, as far as the British were concerned.

D.H. In what sense, was it accidental that they just happened to be there at the wrong time?

R.H. Well, I have a friend Dan Ellsberg who has done a study of crises, and he defines a crisis as a 'fait mal compli' i.e. the Soviet put missiles in Cuba and they were caught before the missiles were in operation; they wanted a fait accompli but it was mal compli and that is why we had a crisis, see, if they had got the missiles in there there would have been very little we could have done about it; it was only because we caught them in the act that we were able to do something about it. Suez '56 was

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fait accompli, instead of putting everybody in a situation where they felt they not only had to do something about it, but they could do something about, and the third crisis Ellsbury had studies, all by the way, a too secret study for Rand strictly unavailable, the third one was Skybolt - what was the fait mal accompli here was McNamara was trying to force the American Airforce away from manned bombers, and so he was aiming at the Airforce not at the British.

D.H. Why was it a fait mal accompli? Didn't he succeed?

R.H. Well he didn't succeed, so there was a crisis chain because he didn't completely get away with it; as far as the British were concerned they got hurt, but he didn't get away with it as far as the Airforce was concerned, the Airforce exposed him and therefore caused trouble. It was just that the British had got hit by a truck.

D.H. Was the American Defence Department aware the British were being hit?

R.H. Well, I suppose, well I don't know intimately, the guy who you ought to talk to is Dick Neustadt. I wasn't personally involved and at the time I was very, very, heavily involved with the Congo; so I was even less involved than I might have been on the Skybolt, but I have the impression that this was McNamara again not being very politically astute.

D.H. This was the criticism of the British

LAOS

D.H. Well I wonder if we might come on to Laos. What contribution would you say Britain made (i) in cautioning against intervention in '61 particularly and (ii) in leading to a cease fire: what was Britain's role as seen by the Americans?

R.H. You ought to talk to Fred Warwick down at your mission here who was at the time in the Foreign Office.

D.H. Were you aware that the British had cautioned restraint?

R.H. No, no: I mean I don't have the impression that the British wade in very heavily and in fact I have the impression that they did not wade in very heavily there, and I think that the reason for this if you asked me at the time and even now is that (I mean I could be wrong in the sense that

trying on specific policies trying to make something of it and, there were people on the American side on specific policies who were trying to resist because they felt the idea of a special relationship was being manipulated for policy reasons.

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D.W. Ball thought that this particular relationship between Britain and the United States was being exploited for short term gains at the expense of long term objectives. How much support was there for the type of view that Mr. Ball expressed specifically on the British deterrent?

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D.W. In what sense, was it accidental that they just happened to be there at the wrong time?

R.H. Well, I have a friend Dan Ellsberg who has done a study of crises, and he defines a crisis as a 'fait mal compli' i.e. the Soviet put missiles in Cuba and they were caught before the missiles were in operation; they wanted a fait accompli but it was mal compli and that is why we had a crisis, see, if they had got the missiles in there there would have been very little we could have done about it; it was only because we caught them in the act that we were able to do something about it. Suez '56 was if a crisis,/the British had taken the canal quickly, it would have been a

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United States said to him, "Look, Averell, I want a political solution": that was the instructions.

D.N. And you don't know how he worked it out?

R.H. Well he worked it as best he could I am sure.

D.N. The British Foreign Secretary at the time told me that he thought that the peace formula that came back was worked out between himself and Mr. Harriman?

R.H. Could be. I am surprised I didn't know Home was there, I heard Harriman tell stories about it, and he never mentioned Home: what that says I don't know. I do know Pushkin, Harriman thought he was keen and Harriman's story was very much between Pushkin and himself; another man whom I know had great influence was Bill Salt.

CUBA

D.N. Coming to Cuba and the Bay of Pigs and the missile crisis. Were you surprised at the British press reaction?

R.H. Well the British press came round after we gave them photographs

D.N. How did you account for the second crisis?

R.H. What do you mean the second one?

D.N. The Cuban missile crisis, the press reaction?

R.H. The initial British press reactions? Nothing surprising about that, they were scared to death - how do you know the missiles are there? My impression was that once the photographs were released and the crisis was brought to a successful conclusion there was no longer hostility.

D.N. To the amateurs the photos didn't prove anything anyway.

R.H. That's not true, as a matter of fact, because the photographs did prove something to a lot of amateurs. The reason I speak with such confidence on this one is because I was the guy who briefed all the ambassadors both In Washington and U.N. ambassadors; it was very interesting to brief two groups, to brief our allies in one group, and then the neutrals. The key photo, the one, when they examined it, was so persuasive to them was where there was a slant U-2 photograph that means a slant photograph is one that covers an enormous amount of terrain but clearly showing

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that
and the thing was so convincing to the Africans was that they sat on
the table and there was a map of Cuba. They looked at the photograph
and could trace out the rail roads, the bridges and everything else, and
then they look up. I would have thought the second wave of reactions was
not so bad.

D.N. Once the photos had been released some people had expressed to me how the
hell could you tell by the photos anyway.

R.H. A specialist can certainly tell from the photos.

D.N. Who appealed for the photos to be released?

R.H. I did principally, and had a hell of a time with the intelligence people
who didn't want to release them. I got Kennedy's permission sort of in
my back pocket as I was taken off to the U.N. I had permission to use
them, because it was just crazy not to use them, but in the meantime, a
young guy, fairly young who was a C.I.A. fellow who accompanied Dean
Acheson, just without asking permission or getting anybody's permission
gave them to the press of Britain.

D.N. I understood that it was David Bruce who released the photos in Britain?

R.H. Well the guy, I'll think of the guy's name, yes it was in Britain that
they were released, and the guy who released them was Chester Cooper, a
C.I.A. fellow who was accompanying Acheson as an aide; they were released
out of Bruce's office, but it was Cooper, who was the C.I.A. man and who
had the photos and he was the one who handed them over.

D.N. And so they were in fact released in Britain before they were released
anywhere else without White House permission?

R.H. That's right.

D.N. When was David Bruce himself informed of the crisis, do you? Would it be
a couple of days before the British were informed?

R.H. Probably.

D.N. One of the things particularly interesting to look at from a British
viewpoint is that during that week there was an Intelligence Conference
going on in Washington.

R.H. Could be. I am surprised I didn't know Home was there, I heard Harriman tell stories about it, and he never mentioned Home: what that says I don't know. I do know Pushkin, Harriman thought he was keen and Harriman's story was very much between Pushkin and himself; another man whom I know had great influence was Bill Salt.

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D.H. One of the things particularly interesting to look at from a British viewpoint is that during that week there was an Intelligence Conference going on in Washington.

R.H. Yes.

D.H. Were you part of it?

R.H. Yes. Crazy it just made everything much more difficult.

D.N. Was this an Anglo-American conference?

R.H. Yes, it's an affair that had gone on for some time, several years and it was a quadruple one - I think the British, the Australians and the New Zealanders, may be the Canadians too.

D.N. I think I am right in saying it was because people like yourself were missing from some of the more important meetings, people began to suspect; indeed it has been hinted to me by one of the participants that in fact somewhere along the line in one of these conferences there were in fact told that the crisis was over Inter-continental Missiles, as far as you know did anybody on the American side tell this?

R.H. I don't think so, actually it was embarrassing, it was embarrassing for two reasons because we kept getting called away by the President; it was sort of embarrassing because we were hosting these people, and then we would go to dinner with them and get called away and miss the dinner, or else we would be so weary you know we weren't making much sense. I would have thought to them actually it wasn't them who I think became suspicious there was clearly a crisis going on.. It was only the very top level fellows being called away, myself, McCane the working level sessions were general briefers anyway; but the people who got on to us on the British side were people from the Embassy and that you'd expect, because they knew the pattern of life in Washington, the press by Saturday knew something big was up, they just didn't know what.

D.N. I just wanted to clarify a point whether in fact the two major participants for Britain were Major General Strong and Sir Hugh Stevenson were told?

R.H. Well, look these guys are old associates you know that is by that I mean a guy like Sherman Kent and Strong have known each other for several years, have worked together, I would not doubt that Kent sort of said look this is what happened.

D.N. Yes, do you think the allies were informed early enough?

R.H. By all means, I would not want to have seen either De Gaulle or the British Government informed any sooner than they were.

more so; De Gaulle asked Acheson - 'are you consulting me or informing me' - which wasn't a bad question.

D.H. And the same with the British were they consulted?

R.H. Douglas Home got involved in some way which you will have to talk to somebody in the White House about, Douglas Home actually, I guess that was later perhaps that was afterwards.

D.H. Could you perhaps give some sort of idea what you meant by that?

R.H. Well in the shaping of the blockade, I think it was Douglas Home's personal idea that the blockade be moved in closer.

D.H. I understood it was David Harlech.

R.H. Well i am sorry I mean't Harlech.

D.H. What about the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary? Were they consulted- Kennedy was on the telephone a lot - was this just informing them?

R.H. Well my impression of the policy decisions - the initial decision to have a blockade was that they were not consulted and I don't see why they should have been.

D.H. Well.

R.H. It was not a NATO thing.

D.H. It was a purely American affair was it?

R.H. Sure.

D.H. Surely the one reason why Kennedy rang MacMillan up was to say that this is not a purely American affair, it's not a purely Cuban-American conflict, it's conflict between the two East and West.

R.H. Maybe again here we are not communicating, but the point was do you accept that the missiles were discovered on the 15th. We had seven days to get a coherent policy. If you read books like my own, the story to get a coherent policy out of the political process and to do so in secret, otherwise it's not going to work. We were able to bring it off in Washington which was a near miracle, if we had tried to introduce several other capitals with all the pushing and pulling hostilities in those Capitals, it's hard enough to get an effective coherent policy

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D.W. Yes, do you think the allies were informed early enough?

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D.W. May I ask why?

R.H. Because both of them would have wanted to get into the act, De Gaulle

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Government; if you had the French Government and the British Government with all their hangups and De Gaulle's hangups we would never have done it, it's as simple as that.

You could not have developed a policy in 7 days if you had true consultations, where the British Cabinet had to get in on the act. If we had the struggle we had getting a policy, you could see the British Cabinet meeting ; they had to agree in a technical form,/going along with this and they had to thrash all these policy alternatives out, you would never have got it, done it would have leaded; the Russians would have known about and before you would have gotten a coherent policy the missiles would have been in place. The missiles were aimed at Washington and the fact that we were in this together that's true too, but we had to take action quickly and secretly, it could not have been done if we had consulted.

D.N. In what was London consulted after the decision was made?

R.H. Well in the sense that as I said I don't know where Harlech's advice or British advice...

D.N. How far were the American administration aware of moves by the Russians in London, were you aware of this?

R.H. Well surely.

D.N. To get G.B. to invite a summit. Was this information given to you?

R.H. Oh sure.

D.N. Throughout the time and how serious was this taken?

R.H. All this was fine and dandy providing the work stops on the missiles, but if you go into any kind of negotiations or the summit while the work was still going on, they'd have won again.

D.N. The British government didn't propose a summit at all?

R.H. My recollection was that the British were helpful from there on.

D.N. That with all respect, Sir, is not what I asked.

R.H. Yes I know but what I am trying to say is that I don't remember all the details because by helpful that is that they agreed to the basic proportion that work on the missiles had to stop. We were adamant; any sort of negotiations that took place

D.H. So they weren't going to invite a summit. How did you view the Russian intentions in these moves.

R.H. My reaction to the moves in London was that there were things going on all over the world, which is a very typical Soviet pattern - that is they do not just go on in London, but also everywhere - in Indonesia there were signals.

D.H. One of the things on the Bay of Pigs that particularly fascinates me is to what extent were you informed and did you take into account the British Intelligence information on the support the Cubans. This was given freely to the Americans.

R.H. Yes, well you see that the Bay of Pigs thing was a very peculiar situation where Allen Dulles and Dick Bissell all hang overs from the Eisenhower administration all emotionally committed deliberately, their motives might have been very pure, but nevertheless they were so emotionally committed that they deliberately cut out information, Allen Dulles did not even inform his Director of Research Bob Amon, his deputy his Director for Intelligence was not clued in on the Bay of Pigs, I tell the story in the book I was head of Intelligence in the State Department and had every right to be informed, and I was cut out myself, and I heard about this sort of in a dropped remark in an intelligence report. I went to the Secretary of State and said - look I find something peculiar about it. Well I said to him you and I know referring to Rusk's military record that the most difficult military operation in the world is landing on a hostile shore, and I said I don't know much about Cuba, but since it seems to me the only possible hope for this is if the Cuban people rally, and I don't know anything about Cuba but I have got plenty of people in my bureau who do. He said and I quote "I am sorry Roger I can't let you do it". What I was saying was that I didn't think the Intelligence that I knew about would lead one to permit this sort of thing. I don't know what i see as a routine matter, the British passed over information to us and we passed over to them and it was circulated and may have been things like that which were in my mind

with this and they had to thrash all these policy alternatives out, you would never have got it, done it would have leaked; the Russians would have known about and before you would have gotten a coherent policy the missiles would have been in place. The missiles were aimed at Washington and the fact that we were in this together that's true too, but we had to take action quickly and secretly, it could not have been done if we had consulted.

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D.M. One of the things on the Bay of Pigs that particularly fascinates me is to what extent were you informed and did you take into account the British Intelligence information on the support for Castro. This was given freely to the Americans.

R.H. Well you see that the Bay of Pigs thing was a very peculiar situation where Allen Dulles and Dick Bissell all hang overs from the Eisenhower administration all emotionally committed deliberately, their motives might have been very pure, but nevertheless they were so emotionally committed that they deliberately cut out information, Allen Dulles did not even inform his Director of Research Bob Amon, his deputy his Director for Intelligence was not clued in on the Bay of Pigs, I tell the story in the book I was head of Intelligence in the State Department and had every right to be informed, and I was cut out myself, and I heard about this sort of in a dropped remark in an intelligence report. I went to the Secretary of State and said - look I find something peculiar about it. Well I said to him you and I know referring to Rusk's military record that the most difficult military operation in the world is landing on a hostile shore, and I said I don't know much about Cuba, but since it seems to me the only possible hope for this is if the Cuban people rally, and I don't know anything about Cuba but I have got plenty of people in my bureau who do. He said and I quote "I am sorry Roger I can't let you do it". What I was saying was that I didn't think the Intelligence that I knew about would lead one to permit this sort of thing. I don't know what i see as a routine matter, the British passed over information to us and we passed over to them and it was circulated and may have been things like that which were in my mind but it's perfectly clear by the way that my experts would have if given a chance have rid of this.

D.N. In a way your estimates were much the same conclusion as the British ones in support for Castro.

R.H. Exactly. You don't have to put it that way. One out of four of the so-called Germans that were on the beach at Normandy you know were in the bunkers, were not Germans at all - they were Russians and Ukrainians and all sorts of people, you know, that doesn't change anything. One of the Cuban rebel leaders said to me once only 10% of the Militia are really avidly pro-Castro but of course, that's enough, may be you have a discontented few, but if 10% of the Militia are pro-Castro, very pro-Castro, that's enough.

D.N. Finally Sir, just on the intelligence leaks, how much concern was there over the security leaks in Britain. Were there any Americans who were so worried about this that they favoured restricted intelligence information?

R.H. This was a very serious problem because the whole business of almost everything you did in a legislative way, especially about atomic energy or defence you know we get up on Capital Hill and tried to argue for a Bill and these things would be thrown in your face.

D.N. What could the British have done in order to prevent this?

R.H. Well I mean these matters are political in the sense that I don't know what the British could do; but I always thought of the ones which hit me hard that is in terms when I would go to Capital Hill, But nobody could argue the British wanted to have a major Soviet spy sitting where Blake was sitting.

D.N. But I mean in what sense was there a movement to get Britain to tighten up her security.

R.H. I would strongly suspect that Dulles or McCone when they saw Strong.. you don't have to say very much because the British were interested when Blake gets exposed, the first thing that happens is that the British send a high level delegation over to the C.I.A. to explain and apologise, and try to co-operate in the sense, you know that which of you fellows is going to end up with his throat cut. Well I don't know of any real movement (to restrict information) in the

evidly pro-Castro but of course, that's enough, may be you have a discontented few, but if 10% of the Militia are pro-Castro, very pro-Castro, that's enough.

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R.H. This was a very serious problem because the whole business of almost everything you did in a legislative way, especially about atomic energy or defence you know we set up on Capital Hill and tried to argue for a Bill and these things would be thrown in your face.

D.N. What could the British have done in order to prevent this?

R.H. Well I mean these matters are political in the sense that I don't know what the British could do; but I always thought of the ones which hit me hard that is in terms when I would go to Capital Hill. But nobody could argue the British wanted to have a major Soviet spy sitting where Blake was sitting.

D.N. But I mean in what sense was there a movement to get Britain to tighten up her security.

R.H. I would strongly suspect that Dulles or McCone when they saw Strong.. you don't have to say very much because the British were interested when Blake gets exposed, the first thing that happens is that the British send a high level delegation over to the C.I.A. to explain and apologise, and try to co-operate in the sense, you know that which of you fellows is going to end up with his throat cut. Well I don't know of any real movement (to restrict information) in the sense of the President, but I would not be a bit surprised if John McCone told before you say anything

to the British, go over and make damn sure your sources are protected - I would imagine that that kind of information might reveal the name and the location and the nature of the sources, I would not be surprised if he wanted these restrictions. The press would have had a field day.